Pot Help

A workbook to help you change your cannabis use
If you've decided getting stoned is no longer working for you, you're not alone.
Every story of drug use and recovery is unique, but there are often many similarities. Adrian was hooked on cannabis, but he says it could have been anything.

But after years of spending all his time and money smoking up and finding his life becoming more and more chaotic, Adrian followed a programme similar to the one in this workbook and turned his life around.

What am I going to do? I feel like my life’s falling apart. I can’t handle these drugs. It’s not helping me, I can’t even get stoned… Everything’s falling apart. My missus is going to leave…” — Adrian

“If you feel that you need something, and when you think about not having it you get agitated, chances are you’re addicted to it.” — Adrian

Many people who have used cannabis have come to realise that the drug they once used to relax is now just causing them anxiety, interfering with their relationships, or leaving them unable to deal with the ups and downs of normal life.

But the good news is many people have been able to stop using cannabis and get their old lives back. It may not be easy, but it can be done and there’s a lot more help and support there for you than you may have thought.

Adrian used to be a big time cannabis smoker, but he came to realise it was keeping him from doing what he really wanted to do. He’s offered to tell his story through this workbook and in his video in the hope it will help others struggling to give up or cut down.
How to use this workbook

There’s no right or wrong way to use this workbook. You might read bits here and there or motor through it in one sitting. Any approach is fine – it’s the commitment to work at it that is most important.

So it might be a good idea to work through a section of the book and spend maybe 30 minutes every day thinking about it.

You could start online by watching the introductory video at drughelp.org.nz/cannabis. The exercises here are a little different to those online, so you could do whichever you think suits you best.

This workbook as well as the tools and videos at drughelp.org.nz/cannabis can help you quit or reduce your cannabis use. Keep in mind that getting control is not a one-off event. It is a process you will work through over a long time, but it does get easier – especially with support from someone.

Want to quit or cut down?

This workbook and online videos are only possible because of the people who so honestly and openly shared their stories. We thank you many times over for bravely stepping forward.

Thanks
There is no doubt some people become addicted to cannabis.

Visit drughelp.org.nz/cannabis and watch the videos of Kiwis talking about how cannabis came to control their lives and what they’re doing about it. These stories may help you assess your own relationship with cannabis and help you to envisage a life without it.

Sometimes thinking about these things can be hard, but be kind to yourself and keep at it. Getting control over cannabis will be a journey, not a race.

How could thinking about the stories in the videos help you quit or cut down?

What thing(s) in the videos most stood out to you?

Did you feel uncomfortable watching any of those stories? If so, what made you uncomfortable?

Is there one person or story that you liked more than the others? And how could thinking about their story help you quit or cut down?

Is it different?

Was there anyone you really didn’t like? What about them irritated you?

I can do the sort of things that I would never have been able to do if I’d been using, especially weed. It’s so debilitating. I think it’s a real downer drug.”

—Bridget
Many people have that belief: this is not addictive. It’s just a plant.” —Bridget

“They talk about marijuana being the softer drug. That’s what makes it so dangerous, because people have a disregard for it.” —Laurie

Do we really think cannabis can’t be harmful or addictive, just because it comes from a plant?

Cannabis is the most commonly-used illegal drug in New Zealand and, after alcohol, the one people most often ask for help with. It can affect a person physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Heavy or long-term use can cause impaired coordination, restlessness, breathing problems, and sleeping problems.

The mental and emotional effects of using cannabis will vary from person to person but can include low mood, irritability, confusion, memory problems, mild hallucinations and depression. Cannabis use in young people has also been linked to educational problems and occasionally mental health problems.
How badly do you want this?

I wanted a better life.
—Perry

If you do want to change, it’s time to identify exactly what your reasons are. How are your relationships, work, finances, criminal record?

Write down the reasons you want to change.

Circle the comment which best describes how you feel.

Circle the comment which best describes how you feel.

I’m satisfied with my cannabis use and don’t plan to change it.

I’m thinking about stopping or reducing my cannabis use, but not in the next 30 days.

Within the past six months, I stopped or reduced the amount of cannabis I use.

More than six months ago, I stopped or reduced the amount of cannabis I use, and I have not returned to my previous level of use.

I hope to stop or reduce the amount of cannabis I use sometime in the next 30 days.

“I wanted a better life.” —Perry
Talking with others about what is going on for you could help you gain some clarity about what you need to do and share the load. So find a good listener who genuinely supports your desire to change.

You could also consider calling the Alcohol Drug Helpline on 0800 787 797. The people at the helpline talk with New Zealanders from all walks of life everyday. You will not be judged and everything you say is in confidence. They can help find the best support for you in your local community.

A big part of what worked for Adrian was hearing other people say they understood him.
Hang on. This isn't really fun anymore.

Think back to the videos on drughelp.org.nz/cannabis. What impact did cannabis have in those people's lives?

People can come to rely on cannabis and that's often when using it stops being a pleasure. Below are some signs that this may be the case.

1. Needing more cannabis to get the same high (increased tolerance).
2. Having symptoms of withdrawal when attempting to stop, or continued use to avoid withdrawal symptoms including restlessness, irritability, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, nervousness and anxiety.
3. Spending more time getting, using, and recovering from cannabis use.
4. Choosing cannabis use over other important activities.
5. Continuing to use cannabis even though it's causing problems.
6. Running out of money to buy cannabis, so stealing or selling drugs to get cash.
7. Craving cannabis or really wanting to use it a lot of the time.
8. Not being able to do what you should at work, school or home because of cannabis use.
9. Using cannabis when it puts you in unsafe situations, eg power tools, driving.
10. Smoking more cannabis than intended in a day/night/week.

If using means you don't start or finish things you want to do, makes you forgetful, becomes necessary for sleep, and prevents you eating properly and looking after yourself, you might end up feeling bad.

Cannabis was affecting Adrian's mood, relationships, family finances, and making him feel empty, desperate and disappointed in himself.

“Like, originally it was awesome. It was about escaping from my emotions and being able to just not worry about things. Near the end it was just a heavy, heavy feeling around my head, I couldn’t think straight, I couldn’t continue a conversation.” —Adrian

“I would like to see him realise the seriousness of it. I think he’s taken the first steps to do something about it, but I still don’t think that he really sees, yeah, the addiction and how serious it is and how much it’s going to affect his life and our relationship and his education and his job, everything, you know. He still thinks that he can sort of have both, and I don’t think he can.” —Melissa
What personality changes have other people noticed and commented on?

What have they said about your cannabis use?

Outside of your whānau, have any relationships suffered as a result of your cannabis use?

How is your health, in general?

How much do you spend on cannabis each week?

How are your finances, in general?

What changes have you noticed in your personality over the years you've been using cannabis?

How are your relationships with your partner and/or parents and whānau?
Sometimes when you are using a lot of cannabis, it’s hard to see how much your life has changed. Take a step back and try looking at it through the eyes of someone else.

And suddenly I’m on home detention because I just needed a smoke, you know. And that was a shake-up.” —Anita

“I was damaging my children. Over time it really took me as a person, I suppose. Slowly gave me really bad depression.” —Anita

Have you ever had a positive drug test?

In which ways have you ever let yourself down?

How many times have you called in sick because you’d used too much cannabis?

In what ways has cannabis affected your work?

In which ways have you ever let your boss or colleagues down?
So, what do I do?

If you’re wanting to stop or cut down on your cannabis use, you are more likely to succeed if you make a plan. This activity will help you develop four points you could use as a basis.

1. What are some things that you can do that are enjoyable and make you feel good about yourself? Think about activities you enjoyed before you started using cannabis or things you’ve always wanted to try. Write down as many options as you can.

2. The next move is to identify good influences. List people you know and like who don’t smoke cannabis.

“It was hard to start off with, but it definitely helped having real supportive mates.” —Martini

Did you consider painting, sport, cooking, music, gardening, tramping, acting, volunteering? There are endless options so add to your list whenever you think of another possibility. The activities and interests you’ve listed will fill your life and form the backbone of your plan.

Make a commitment to spend more time with the people you have listed, preferably in places where you have never smoked.
3. It’s natural to get cravings when you first give up cannabis. It can help to avoid situations that might make you want to smoke again. Write down three situations, people or environments you will avoid to limit your cravings.

4. Lastly, it’s a good idea to have a new routine that will help you quit or cut back. What will your day look like?

Here are some things other people have said helped.

- **Phone a friend** who wants to support you. Let them know you may call day or night.

- **Get rid of all your papers, bongs, pipes and cannabis smoking tools.**

- **Make a deal with yourself to wait 20 minutes when you feel like smoking. Often the cravings will pass.**

- **Clear the decks. Reduce your other commitments for the first couple of weeks so you can focus.**

- **Think about a reward. Mark your quit day on a calendar and decide how many days need to pass without cannabis before you can have the reward.**

- **If possible, talk through this plan with someone you trust. They might have some great ideas.**
Adrian is a professional carver and he found he worked much quicker, and with greater accuracy, once he stopped smoking cannabis. It improved his mood, relationships and career, and these were all good results for him.

Think about some of the good things that may result for you from quitting or cutting down, such as fewer fights with your partner or being a better influence on younger family members.

Most people decide the best way forward is to give up cannabis entirely. However, even if you feel you can maintain a controlled level of use, don’t rule out quitting if your use creeps back up.

Write down all the good things that could happen if you cut down or quit, such as fewer fights with your partner, or being a better influence on younger family members. Underline or highlight the ones most important to you.
Am I cured?

The temptation to smoke cannabis will pop up every now and again, sometimes even months after you give up.

Wanting a smoke does not mean you’ve failed. Sometimes it’s just a response to certain situations or feelings.

Adrian went to a party where people were smoking cannabis. He hadn’t smoked for two years but found himself lingering where the people were smoking and considering grabbing a wee nugget to take home. It frightened him how easily he almost slipped back into smoking cannabis.

“It just scared the hell out of me. I was like—Oh my God, that was so quick. And I just said, ‘Look, guys, I’m not dealing with it being here, I’m going to go.’ They all knew where I’d been and they were like, sweet, no worries. So I just got myself out of there basically.” —Adrian

In the back of Adrian’s mind was the thought that he would have to own up about having smoked again. He was so proud of having not used cannabis for 900 days and he wasn’t prepared to throw that away.

Filling your life with fun, stimulating activities and supportive people will bring you closer to a point where your dependence on cannabis will start to fade, but it won’t always be easy.

When you find yourself struggling, don’t hesitate to go to any of your support people. Or call the Alcohol Drug Helpline on 0800 787 797 to talk it over.

Take the time now to think about alternatives to smoking cannabis. Go back to your list of enjoyable activities and choose the five that will best distract you when cravings appear.
You’ll start participating in life with an energy you’ve never had. My connection with my kids is just huge now. They look up to me and they tell me stuff. That’s a huge gift, y’know. It’s like looking back at a different life.” — Sam

Quitting or cutting back isn’t always an easy road, but a lot of people say it’s an easier road than relying on cannabis. It takes time but many find they are stronger than they realised. You could come to be very proud of the resolve you have within you.

It’s time to consider where you’re going: the future.

What would your perfect life look like?

If all your wishes could come true, what would your life look like?

“Start participating in life with an energy you’ve never had. My connection with my kids is just huge now. They look up to me and they tell me stuff. That’s a huge gift, y’know. It’s like looking back at a different life.” — Sam
Choose a date within the next week and specify whether you intend to quit or reduce your smoking by then. You don’t need to quit outright (although many people find that is easier than cutting back). You could start today by using half the cannabis you usually use.

Write down your goals for changing your cannabis use.

Call the Alcohol Drug Helpline on 0800 787 797. These guys understand what you’re going through and will help you figure out what form of treatment or support is right for your situation.

Visit drughelp.org.nz/cannabis and use the online tools to track your progress.

Identify those people you can talk to and sign up a trusted friend or family member to be your support person.

Visit your GP for confidential advice and support.

Now is a good time to make a deal with yourself. What will be your next step?

Consider which of these options you will commit to. There are no right or wrong answers – every option is a step along the path towards recovery.

No one said this is going to be easy but people have said it is worth it. Good luck.
Here are two other things you can do as you set out to cut down or quit using cannabis.

**How to control cravings**

Certain people and places can ‘trigger’ cravings that might make you smoke again.

These slips are a major hurdle to successful quitting so if you can avoid trigger situations you will give yourself a better chance of not using cannabis.

It can be difficult to identify your exact triggers, so try thinking about your day and at what times or with whom you would normally smoke. Describe those situations:

The situations you’ve outlined are your triggers and here are some strategies for avoiding them.

- Change the way you think about smoking. Unlike air, water and food, cannabis is not a necessity.
- Change trigger situations. Avoid friends who use cannabis for a few weeks, re-arrange the room you most often smoke in, remove all bongs, pipes, papers and cannabis smoking tools.
- When you do start hanging out with those friends again, go for a long walk whenever the cannabis comes out.
- Put off the decision to smoke for 20 minutes. Often cravings will go away and over time it will become much easier.
- When you feel like smoking, do something totally unrelated to cannabis. Go for a walk, read a book, go for a swim/skate/ride – anything you don’t do while you smoke.
- Remind yourself every day of your successes so far.
- Have a list of people who support you and call them.

It really helps to write down the way you are thinking as you gain control over a substance like cannabis.

You can use this workbook to store your thoughts. It could be good to come back to them later to see how your thoughts have developed and your determination has grown.

Date your entries and try to write often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT MAKES ME CRAVE CANNABIS?</th>
<th>STRATEGY TO AVOID THE TRIGGER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanging with smoking mates</td>
<td>Avoid smoking friends for a while and eliminate all papers and bongs etc from my flat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowing what makes you crave cannabis will make this journey so much easier for you, and one day they will cease to be triggers.

### Be kind to yourself

Often, we are our own harshest critics and the way we talk to ourselves can undermine our confidence and motivation. We can tell ourselves we are hopeless or unable to change, when the opposite is actually true.

The good news is you can over-ride these thoughts and introduce others which are productive and supportive.

Create a chart for yourself using this format. Go through this for all common situations or events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT OR SITUATION</th>
<th>NEGATIVE THOUGHT</th>
<th>STOP</th>
<th>REPLACEMENT THOUGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>One smoke won’t hurt</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>I’m doing so well without cannabis. I’m not giving up my goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First weekend of hanging out with non-smoking friends</td>
<td>Life is so boring without cannabis</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>Life will be so much better without cannabis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three steps to change your thinking and therefore your cannabis use:

1. Catch the negative thought that occurs when you crave a smoke.
2. Shout “STOP” to yourself in your head.
3. Challenge the thought by replacing it with a positive thought.
Alcohol Drug Helpline 0800 787 797
• Pasifika line 0800 787 799
• Whaka-tu-tangata 0800 787 798

Narcotics Anonymous 0800 628 632